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DALLAS

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**PROTESTANT  
SISTERS OF CHARITY;**

**A LETTER**

ADDRESSED TO

**THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,**

DEVELOPING

**A PLAN FOR IMPROVING**

**THE ARRANGEMENTS AT PRESENT EXISTING FOR**

**ADMINISTERING MEDICAL ADVICE,**

**AND VISITING**

**THE SICK POOR.**

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**1826.**

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## A LETTER,

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MY LORD,

IN taking the liberty to address your Lordship, I am encouraged by the consideration that my object is to draw your attention to a plan, which has in view an amelioration in the condition of a large number of the poor inhabitants of this country, in a most important particular. Such an object alone, would, I am convinced, procure my pardon for the intrusion; but, as the plan, if it be attempted, must be intimately connected with the parochial clergy, I trust that I shall not be considered impertinent in addressing myself to your Lordship.

In the present age, which is so remarkably characterised by a spirit of Christian charity and the active exertions of benevolence, when almost every field for the exercise of this spirit has been accurately examined that its operations might be systematically arranged, it is to be regretted that so little attention should have been paid to the arrangements which are made for providing



the poorest classes of the people in this country with medical assistance in sickness. I do not allude to the inhabitants of large towns and their immediate neighbourhood. These the characteristic spirit of the age has supplied with medical advantages, by means of the numerous hospitals, infirmaries, and dispensaries, such as are frequently beyond the reach of the class of society a step above them, whose means will not purchase what the munificent subscriptions in most large towns gratuitously afford to the poor man. But these advantages are not available, except in a few cases, to the labouring and manufacturing inhabitants of the parishes situated beyond the circles which extend two or three miles round each of these favoured towns. A very large proportion of the population of the whole country, therefore, is necessarily beyond the influence of these charitable institutions ; and when the situation of that portion, with respect to medical advice in sickness, is inquired into, I fear that it will be found, in most cases, to be exceedingly deplorable.

Some experience as curate of a parish very large in extent and containing upwards of 2000 souls, assisted by much inquiry upon the subject generally, will enable me to state the following particulars as a fair report of the situation, in this respect, of a considerable number of the parishes lying four or five miles distant from any large town.

The overseers of the different parishes give notice that they will receive tenders from the medical men in the neighbourhood, stating the lowest terms at which they will attend the poor who may be sick during the year. These tenders are to specify a certain fixed sum, which includes the payment for their time, their science, and their medicines. In consequence of the competition, the sum is always disproportionably small, and may be generally estimated at the rate of from 30s. to 50s. a hundred upon the whole population. The parish I have just alluded to, as containing more than 2000 souls, pays 40*l.* a year, which is not considered low. The consequence of this arrangement would seem to be, that such contracts are not worth the consideration of respectable surgeons, and must necessarily fall into the hands of inefficient or half-educated apothecaries; and such is frequently the case, but not so frequently as might be imagined, in consequence of the results attending the taking of these contracts. The parish doctor is often seen in the village, is ready at the call of the farmers, shopkeepers, and those who are able to pay for themselves, and the medical man who farms the parish is thereby introduced into a considerable extent of village business, which constitutes a large portion of the income of most country practitioners. Hence it is, that many well-educated and respectable surgeons undertake these losing con-



tracts, and hence, unfortunately, they are induced to undertake more than one of them at a time. Overseers look to the amount of the terms only, or principally; distance of abode and medical ability scarcely ever enter into the account; and thus very many country surgeons contract with three, four, and even five parishes.

But the consequences to the poor are as bad in this case as when the contracts are taken by inefficient persons, for the principal attention of the medical man is engaged with his profitable patients, and the poor are neglected to a degree which nothing but positive experience would render credible: an ignorant shopman, dignified with the name of an assistant, visits nine poor patients out of ten; a number of days are allowed to pass, in cases where life depends upon unremitting attention and the watching of a crisis; and though it would be too much to say *positively* that any one has died who would *certainly* have been saved, yet several cases of death have occurred, within my own knowledge, in which it may be fairly stated that, with proper attention, there is every probability that death might have been averted.

It should be remembered, that, when sickness afflicts a poor man's family, though he may have been able, by his daily earnings, to procure his daily food without applying to the parish, yet he may be unable to meet this new emergency, and pay for medical advice, and, consequently,

he must go to the parish doctor. At the present rate of agricultural wages, as proportioned to the price of provisions, it may be fairly estimated that nine-tenths of the labouring poor have no power of obtaining medical assistance, except from the parish, and, when the improvident and lavish habits of the manufacturing poor are considered, the proportion of those amongst them who can pay for medical aid cannot be estimated as greater than that of the labouring class.

There are, besides, a number of poor persons in every parish, who are altogether without even the alternative of procuring the assistance of the parish doctor, except in very extreme cases. I mean those who are settled in parishes to which they do not legally belong; for the surgeon's agreement with the overseers is expressly restricted to those who are *parishioners*. There can hardly be a parish of any extent in the kingdom, where many persons unconnected with the parish, by any legal settlement, are not to be found. Every expense which the parish incurs for these during sickness is so much loss, until the overseers have procured a suspended order of removal, which requires the attendance of a magistrate at the sick person's bed. This it is often difficult to procure, and, in cases of infectious disorders, sometimes impossible. The overseers, therefore, of most parishes commonly, allow a trifling illness, in an out-parishioner, to grow into an alarming disease before they will



afford him the least medical assistance, for which they must pay beyond their contracted sum; and the poor man, who has the misfortune to fall sick in a parish to which he does not belong, is wholly without a legitimate means of obtaining the advice upon which, not unfrequently, the preservation of his life depends.

The great evils resulting from the particulars I have related have attracted attention in many places, and local circumstances have been taken advantage of to remedy or lessen the misery to which these evils have given rise. In Warwickshire, a liberal and enlightened surgeon has successfully established a general infirmary upon a plan admirably adapted to counteract the evil tendency of the system of farming parishes, according to which the poor contribute annually 5s. each, to entitle them to the advantages of medical advice; when they are so ill as to require medical attendance at home, it is paid for from the funds, by which means they are placed upon the same footing as their more independent neighbours.\*

It is not my intention to trouble your Lordship with more details than are necessary to point

\* Mr. Henry Lilley Smith, of Southam in Warwickshire, the surgeon alluded to, has published an outline of his plan, entitled "Observations on the prevailing practice of supplying Medical Assistance to the Poor, commonly called the Farming of Parishes;" printed by the Philanthropic Society, St. George's-fields.



out the importance of the object in view ; should they be called for, further details can be easily brought forward, of which it may confidently be asserted, that they will tend to confirm the conviction that an evil exists which calls for some remedy.

The labouring class in the country are in general exposed to privations sufficiently painful. Comparatively few of them cultivate or estimate that provident spirit which is of so much importance to make their little means equivalent to their wants. The expenses of their food, clothing, fuel, and lodging, and the little items necessarily added for light, washing, &c. are generally above, and very rarely within, the utmost income that their labour will produce. Many of them are not brought to live within this income, until, having become irretrievably in debt, at all the shops in the neighbourhood, they have no longer the power of exceeding it. This state of things produces fretfulness of temper, domestic broils, and dishonest practices ; and though the privations of the individual may excite the commiseration of the Christian visitor to the poor man's cottage, yet that feeling can hardly be expressed without such a mixture of reproof as renders it bitter and unacceptable. When disease assails the abode of such poverty, a more legitimate subject of sympathy and commiseration is afforded to the visitor, and the poor man's spirit that would revolt from the lan-

guage of admonition and reproof, is in a great degree quelled ; his personal fears, or his natural affections, interpose their softening power, and thus a fitter occasion for influencing the heart occurs on the one hand, and a greater readiness to receive the Christian influence exists on the other.

Where the extent of a clergyman's charge is within his power of fulfilling it, it is to be hoped that such important opportunities are seldom lost, and it is heart-cheering to reflect on the numbers of such opportunities, which, through the efficient exertions of the parochial clergy, and the praiseworthy assistance of pious individuals, especially of the female sex, are improved. But, on the other hand, it is no less heart-rending to consider that immense numbers of such opportunities are necessarily lost and unimproved. Many parishes, which are in the charge of one clergyman, are too large in extent, and too redundant in population, to admit of his own personal visiting to any efficient degree, in all the cases of sickness which occur, even if his whole time, or a very large portion of it, were entirely devoted to this object. Of these parishes, however, and others much smaller in extent and population, many livings are so insufficient in point of emolument that the incumbent cannot live in his proper station in society without some addition to his income ; in the parishes also where the duties are delegated to curates, the stipend is rarely



sufficient to support the curate and his family upon the footing of a gentleman: all these persons are necessarily obliged to employ much of their time in such a manner as will increase their incomes ; some take pupils, others devote themselves to literary pursuits, and thus their power of beneficially visiting their sick parishioners is very considerably reduced. In a parish for instance occupying a space fifteen miles in circumference, and containing 2000 inhabitants, it is physically impossible that the clergyman alone can do all the good, by visiting the sick poor, which he will find occasion to do, and which his heart and his duty will prompt him to do, especially if the situation of the parish happen to be unhealthy, and more especially during a sickly season like the present.

In such a situation the assistance of those persons in the neighbourhood, who are led by their own feelings to carry the balm of sympathy, and the consolations or admonitions of religion to the bedside of the sick or dying poor man, is indeed infinitely useful, and, where it is judiciously afforded, it never can be too highly appreciated. But, though of so much importance and so valuable, as far as it goes, it bears no proportion to the need there is of such visiting as I have described. Such assistance is exceedingly useful as an auxiliary, but there are many reasons why it should not be sufficient to make up the unavoidable deficiency in the clergyman's

attendance. It is not regular—it is not permanent—it is a voluntary duty, and must, therefore, give way to many others that are imperative, or are considered as such—it is not under control, and may not unfrequently, therefore, be injudiciously administered, without the possibility of a check—it is altogether withdrawn in the most needful cases where there is fear of infection.

It will not be necessary at present to go further into this part of the subject, but it may be as well if we look to the situation of a poor labouring or manufacturing man, during the sickness of himself or his family, according to the present state of things. He is taken ill at his labour with the symptoms of incipient fever; his nerveless limbs refuse the excitement to work, which, nevertheless, he continues for several days; overpowered at length he applies to the overseer, who gives him a note to the Parish Doctor; this he takes to the Doctor's residence at the next town, five, six, or seven, or possibly eight miles off; here, if he is fortunate enough to meet with the Doctor himself, he has some medicines given him and is told to go home and go to bed, or if, as is more likely, he only sees the assistant, he may be equally charged with medicines perhaps, fitting or unfitting, but he is probably told to come back the next day. By the time the man arrives at his cottage, however, he is in no condition to obey the latter order, if it should have been given, but instinctively complies with the former, whether



given or not; he lies in bed, day after day, till the assistant calls, but these calls of the doctor's assistant are any thing but satisfactory. I do not remember ever hearing that the natural inquiries, either of the patient or his near relatives, as to the nature or degree of his illness were satisfied; it is the custom with these persons to maintain a mysterious silence, and the time which is occupied in putting three or four questions, and feeling the pulse, rarely exceeds five minutes, and generally completes this medical visit; the result of the visit is, that the patient is desired to send to the doctor's for more medicine; for this the wife must leave her husband's bedside, if she has no child old enough to go to the doctor's for her, or can get no neighbour to undertake the journey; if the man's constitution be strong enough to carry him through his illness, nature does her work, and, in spite of every thing, he recovers, but if his constitution be unable to struggle with the disease, he grows sensibly worse, and then somebody tells the Clergyman, who finds the poor man in great danger, and speaks to the doctor or the overseer, and, perhaps, more attention is paid; the doctor comes himself, and finds it too late, and the man dies, or, at the best, he is brought with difficulty, through a long course of debility, to a tardy and imperfect recovery. At the period of the Clergyman's visit he comes with all the disadvantage of knowing nothing of the state of the man's mind during the

course of his illness; he has no preparatory information of the effect which the time for consideration may have produced; this he has to discover in his conversation, and the difficulty of overcoming the timidity of the poor, generally, in opening their minds to persons much above them in station, experience will prove to be very great.

Hundreds of cases in large parishes, removed from great towns, will justify the description here given, and very many will far exceed it in neglect. In this case, had there been any person competent to recognise the symptoms of disease, and able to apply a simple remedy or palliative, to whom the poor man could have readily resorted when he first felt ill, his fever might probably have been prevented, and, if not, the sufficient attention of an experienced person, reporting judiciously to the doctor, and watching the progress of his symptoms in daily visits, might have saved his life, or shortened his period of illness; but, beyond all this, the kind and Christian conversation of some one sympathising with his sufferings, and endeavouring to assist in removing them, and whose station should be sufficiently above his own to call for respect, but not so far elevated as to create restraint and fear, might produce the best spiritual effects in the state of his mind, and, at all events, would be a means of conveying such information upon the subject to the appointed pastor, as would enable him to apply the word in season, and would prevent him from wasting



much of the little time which he could afford for visiting the poor invalid.

Such would be some of the most evident benefits which would result, (many others remain to be brought forward,) could it be possible to obtain in each parish, where the exigences required it, the constant residence of a person whose duty it should be to search out and visit the sick; who should be fitted, by a previous course of education, to recognise the features of disease, and make use of simple remedies, which are generally few; who should have medicines ready at hand, and who should regularly report to the surgeon the progress of such difficult cases as required his attendance; who should join to this an earnest spirit of piety, and be able to combine an attention to the spiritual diseases of the patient, with a tender care for his bodily afflictions; and who should be under the directions of the appointed pastor of the flock, receiving his instructions, and affording him the benefit of the closer observation into the spiritual state of each patient, which such advantageous opportunities would admit of. It must, I think, be generally admitted, that, for such an office, the tender sympathies and zealous impulses of the female sex would be the fittest, and the example of a neighbouring nation may serve to convince us of the great advantages which may be derived from an organized body of women devoted to similar duties.

Your Lordship is no doubt aware, that there is an order of nuns in France, called “*Les Sœurs de la Charité*”. Permit me to recall to your mind the nature of this order. They consist of women of all ranks of society, many of them having been born in the very highest classes, but who, from various causes, wish to separate themselves from the world, not in the sense in which that phrase applies to other orders of nuns, by surrounding themselves with high walls, but rather in its scriptural sense, while they are impelled, by their religious feelings, to devote themselves to the benefit of their fellow creatures. They take vows, and pass a noviciate of a twelve-month within the convent, and under the immediate inspection of the head of their order. At the end of this twelvemonth, they have the power of withdrawing from their vows, and returning to the world if they desire it. However, it very rarely occurs, that a noviciate *Sœur de la Charité* alters her mind at the end of her probation; and, if she continue steady in her intention, she then takes the vows which bind her for life, to devote herself actively to the work of charity, for the love of God. These nuns have two distinct objects in view; the first is to attend upon the sick, and the second is to educate the poor. They are distributed all over France, and are the principal nurses in the hospitals. They are to be found in every town, and search out the most wretched abodes of disease and want. Others reside in



villages, and convey the first rudiments of instruction to the children of the poor. The good that is done by them, is incalculable; and the misery which they relieve, by the affectionate sympathy of their attentions, is even greater than that which is removed by their plain sense in medicine, and their excellent nursing. They carry their religion with them wherever their medical usefulness gains them admittance; and the rosary and the crucifix are as important to them as the medicine chest. During a residence in France of some years, though I made many inquiries concerning them, I never heard of one of the order who disgraced her profession by any stain upon her character. There are, I believe, upwards of fifteen hundred of these Sœurs de la Charité, who are ready to attend to every requisition for their services. If a hospital wants a nurse, or a parochial curé has need of assistance amongst his flock, application is made to the Compagnie des Sœurs de la Charité, and, whatever the distance or the difficulty, the charitable sisters set forth at the call. They usually, I believe invariably, are stationed in pairs, which arrangement is made for their own comfort, that, in all the distressing and difficult situations in which they may be placed, one may afford assistance, support, and sympathy to the other. They are under the command of the head of the order, who disposes of them in the stations she sees fit, obedience being a part of their vow. The government pays

a hundred francs a year to each Sœur de Charité to supply her with clothes, and, besides, defrays her travelling expences. If their support cannot be provided from the funds of the hospital, or the parochial resources where their services are required, they are supplied from the general fund of the order; and the active portion of their lives being passed in this labor of love, the period of their decline is rendered comfortable within the precincts of their convent, where even their latest years are beneficially employed in preparing the noviciates for a new course of charitable exertion. They wear a distinguishing dress of the plainest kind, and they meet with the most universal attention and respect from all classes of people, the high as well as the low, the rich as well as the poor. In travelling about the country, from station to station, and in all the situations into which they are thrown, their only but their sure protection is the dress of their order, and such is the reverence in which they are held, that even more enlightened persons than the common peasantry hail it as a happy omen, when upon a journey, if a Sœur de Charité happen to travel by the same conveyance; while several instances are recorded in which the presence of one of them has saved a party of travellers from the attacks of robbers, or the insults of unprincipled men. The surest token of the value of their labors, and perhaps the highest proof that could by possibility be afforded of



their acknowledged usefulness, may be drawn from the practical panygeric which was passed on them during the French Revolution. At that period of atheism, anarchy, and horror, when every outward appearance of religion was a sure proscription, and the ready guillotine was the test by which an open profession of faith was put to the proof, a great number of the Sœurs de Charité undauntedly maintained their "faith that worketh by love," and many of them retained the badge of their profession; yet were they rarely molested; their fruits bore the stamp of such evident usefulness, even to the minds of the monsters possessed with the demon spirit of the revolution, whose name indeed was Legion, that they forbore to destroy, and the remembrance of the offices performed by one of these Samaritan Sisters in the time of sickness, has stayed the uplifted hand and quelled the murderous cry of many an infuriated wretch; no doubt that several Sœurs de Charité in various parts suffered, but it is on record that several were left unharmed while they continued in the exercise of their divine work, and it is certain that they were the only order of persons, connected with religion, who were permitted openly to perform their vows, and discharge their allotted office, \* in which they

\* Many of our countrymen, whom the fate of war or the sudden attacks of disease have laid upon the bed of sickness in France, can bear testimony to the merits and the attentions of the Sœurs de Charité. The following passage occurs in

were reinstated by the revolutionary government, as soon as the subsiding of the first impulse of anarchy permitted the intervention of any government at all.

From the circumstances to which I have taken the liberty of calling your Lordship's attention, I think we may come to these conclusions; first, that in England a state of distress and misery exists to a very considerable extent amongst the

Southey's *Life of Wellington*, published first in the *Quarterly Review*, vol. 13, p. 470, to which I have referred, not having the separate work at hand. "Here (at Pau) we (the English army) had a hospital established, where les Sœurs de la Charité attended upon our sick and wounded soldiers; one of the first measures of the revolutionary government, after what they themselves called the general devastation, was to recall these nuns, whose want had been severely felt in all the hospitals. *On a fait,*' said M. Portalis, '*la triste experience que des mercénaires, sans motif interieur, qui puisse les attacher constamment à leur devoir, ne sauraient remplacer des personnes animées par l'esprit de la religion, c'est-à-dire, par un principe qui est superieur aux sentimens de la nature, et qui pouvant seul motiver tous les sacrifices, est seul capable de nous faire braver tous les dégouts et tous les dangers.*' Louis XVI. wishing to improve the state of the hospitals in France, sent a member of the Academy of Sciences to England to inquire into the manner in which such establishments were conducted here; the agent praised them as they deserved, but remarked that two things were wanting; the zeal of the French parochial Clergy, and the charity of the Hospital nuns. This digression may be excused in gratitude to a most useful and exemplary order, to whose pious offices so many of our wounded countrymen are beholden; perhaps also it may lead to some useful thoughts."



poorest classes of the people, and which occurs at a time when they are least able to contend against it, that is, when they are afflicted with sickness and need most consolation, and also at a time when they are most open to the influence of religion; and to relieve which state no organised system of sufficient applicability has hitherto been acted upon;—secondly, that in France an organised system adapted to ameliorate if not to remedy a similar state of distress and misery, has been in force for two centuries, and has been attended with the happiest results.

If inquiry will justify these conclusions, as I may confidently venture to assert that it will, the question that is naturally suggested to the mind is, why cannot a similar system be organised in England? This question has occurred to me frequently, and I have long thought upon the subject, but I confess I am at a loss for any reason why the evils I have pointed out, as existing in England, might not be very considerably diminished by means similar in principle and outline to those which have been found so successful in France. I have conversed with many persons upon the subject, and I think that all the objections that I have ever heard against establishing in England a society similar to that of *les Sœurs de Charité*, may be reduced to the following:—

1. Some say that the Roman Catholic religion is a religion of works, and, consequently, that

such an excitement is created for the performance of *meritorious* works, as will alone produce the degree of devotion to the duties required necessary to overcome the difficulties and privations which must result to the person engaged in them.

It is not to be denied that the Roman Catholic religion is a religion of works; it is not to be denied that a religious impulse alone can produce the degree of devotion to the duties required necessary to overcome the difficulties and privations which must result to the person engaged in them; but it is distinctly to be denied that the religion of Christ, in that pure and apostolic form of it which is the religion of the Church of England, is incapable of creating such an excitement as will produce the degree of devotion required. It is not for me to point out to your Lordship the constraining influence of faith in that blessed Word, which contains the assertion that “pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world;” but, having mentioned the objection as having been urged, I shall only meet it, at present, by the assertion that the Protestant reformed religion, when faithfully received into the heart, is capable of producing the degree of excitement required for the performance of such duties as will be proposed for English Sisters of Charity; and I



will reserve any argument upon the point, until it shall be called for.

2. Others say that the habits, manners, and state of society in this country, are such as prevent the possibility of establishing a society of *Sœurs de Charité*.

This might be a very good objection, if it were proposed to take the rule of the order in France, and adopt it verbatim for a Society in England; or if it were intended to bind any one by an irrevocable vow; or to tempt any to leave their station in society, and desert the duties of that state of life to which God has pleased to call them, to take upon them other duties, in another state of life, as a penance. But this objection can have no weight against a plan for *adapting the principle* which is acted upon in France to the habits, manners, and state of society in England.

3. Other objectors say that a little learning is a dangerous thing, and that, with a smattering of medical knowledge, the persons, thus half-educated, would do more harm than good, by fancying themselves more expert doctors than they would be, and acting accordingly.

To this it would be enough to say, that, in the French *Sœurs de Charité*, experience has proved, in hundreds of cases, that a moderate degree of plain common sense medical knowledge may be beneficially employed. But it may also be stated, that a selection must be made of such

persons as are wise enough to discern the boundaries of their own powers, and humble enough not to attempt to step beyond them. It may be difficult to find such persons, but it certainly is not impossible; on the contrary, it may be confidently hoped that many such may be found in this happy country.

4. Again, it has been said that, to establish such a system will require considerable funds, which it will be very difficult to obtain.

The best answer to this objection may be drawn from the reports of the different charities for religious and benevolent purposes in England; the amount of the whole put together will be found to exceed four hundred thousand pounds a year. This will leave little doubt that any rational plan for relieving distress, or for the advancement of religion, which is fairly placed before the British public, will never fail for want of funds. The real weight of the objection, however, can only be estimated when the expenses attending the plan shall have been ascertained, and the smaller these prove to be, the less important will the objection appear.

As none of these objections have appeared to me conclusive against the possibility of establishing a body of females in England, performing the duties I have pointed out, I have ventured to arrange a plan upon which such a society might be formed in this country, and I will hasten to lay that plan before your Lordship.



It is proposed that a Society of Females be formed, to be called THE PROTESTANT SISTERS OF CHARITY, (unless some fitter name should be selected for it); that they shall be placed in parishes where the particular exigences most require them; and that their occupation shall be to visit the sick and afflicted, administer simple remedies for such diseases as they are able to recognise, and act under the directions of the appointed medical man in such as are above the reach of their knowledge; that in all cases they shall make it a main object to improve the opportunities afforded them for the advancement of true religion in the hearts of their patients; that with this view they shall be placed under the superintendence and direction of the parochial clergy, to whom they shall report the results of their visits, and from whom they shall receive instructions.

That an essential qualification for a Sister of Charity shall be such a spirit of piety as shall dispose her to desire the situation rather for the active exercise of Christian charity to which it devotes her, than for the secular advantages which she may obtain. The emoluments shall be such as shall afford each Sister a security against want, and support her in a station sufficiently raised above the poor to excite respect, but not so elevated as to take her far out of the sphere of the poor man's sympathies.

That no persons shall be admitted who shall

not have arrived at such an age as may seem to promise steadiness and maturity of judgment, nor any whose advanced period of life or general state of health would tend to unfit them for active exertion.

That persons, so qualified, and desirous of becoming members of the Sisterhood, shall pass through a course of preparation in two ways; and that, to this end, they shall remain, at least one year, in an establishment formed for that purpose, during which period they shall be called Probationary Sisters. In the first place, they shall have the advantage of the religious instructions afforded by a Chaplain, and conform to the rules of the house, under the conduct and inspection of a Matron; and, in the second place, they shall attend the hospitals, and receive the benefit of the instruction offered to them by the physicians, in medical points of plain practical advantage.

That donations shall be collected for defraying the first expenses of such an establishment, and subscriptions for providing the means of continuing it when established.

That his Majesty should be humbly solicited to be the Patron of the Society; and that the Archbishops and Bishops should be earnestly intreated to afford it their countenance and support. That such of them as thought fit to honour it with their approbation should be Presidents of the Society, as well as any other



distinguished persons who might kindly accept the office.

That three separate committees be chosen from amongst the subscribers;—1st, a Ladies' Committee, which shall be charged with the inspection and internal arrangement of the establishment; 2d, a General Committee, to which the management of the affairs of the Society should be intrusted; and, 3d, a Medical Committee, whose business shall be to examine the Sisters as to their medical knowledge. That the Chaplain and the Matron shall be the only stipendiary officers of the Society, and that the Chaplain shall be also Secretary.

That no Probationary Sister shall be admitted as a Sister of Charity until she can obtain three certificates; one from the Matron, stating that she has resided at least one year in the establishment, during which she has conformed to all the regulations, and otherwise conducted herself in an approved manner; this certificate must be countersigned by one of the Ladies' Committee, in the name of the whole;—a second certificate from the Chaplain, declaring that, to the best of his judgment, she is well instructed in religion and piously disposed;—and a third from the chairman of the Medical Committee, setting forth that she has been examined as to the medical knowledge she has acquired, and that she has been found efficient for the duties she is about to undertake (a standard of efficiency

having been previously determined upon by the members of the committee);—that these certificates shall be presented to the General Committee, which shall retain them, and grant, in lieu of them, a general certificate of approval and appointment as a Sister of Charity.

That the different officers called upon to grant such several certificates shall each be mainly influenced by the appearance of sincere piety, the real interest in the duty to be undertaken, the plain good sense, kindliness of disposition, activity of mind, sober demeanour, and, as relates to medicine, unpresuming teachableness, which they may have been able to observe in the characters of those who may come before them for that purpose.

That the Medical Committee shall be requested to compile a book of plain instructions, containing the essential rules of common practice, the mode of applying common remedies, and the best means of detecting the early symptoms of disease, in simple and untechnical language, and that this book be considered the Medical guide of the Sisters of Charity.

That the Sisters shall be earnestly invited to pass a certain portion of time, after their probation, in some of the lying-in hospitals, where admittance shall be procured for them, that they may be qualified to overlook, if not to supersede, the common village midwives; and that such as agree to this proposal, be furnished with an



additional certificate of their ability in this particular, and that special attention be paid to this point in the choice of sisters for the most important situations.\*

That such of the parochial clergy as wish to have the assistance of one or more of the Sisters of Charity, may make application to the General Committee for that purpose. That, previous to making such application, the clergyman shall ascertain what sum he can raise, by subscription in his parish, towards defraying the expense of her support, and what advantages he can otherwise offer her;—that, in stating these particulars to the Committee, he shall also state the popu-

\* It is remarkable that so little attention should have been hitherto paid to the improvement of the village midwives, who are very generally extremely ignorant, and incumbered with all the prejudices which the last fifty years have swept away from the minds of even the most moderately educated. Happy is it that Nature needs no assistance in the majority of cases, for, where she requires any, these assistants are unable to afford it. In most of the fatal cases of parturition, the woman dies from hæmorrhage, the remedies for which are the most opposed to the old women's prejudices, but require to be applied without the least delay. In these instances, the time that is lost in sending for the surgeon loses the life of the patient, which might be saved by the prompt interference of an experienced person possessed of presence of mind. It may be a question whether this certificate, therefore, should not be universally required from the Sisters of Charity, while, on the other hand, such a requirement might tend to exclude some otherwise desirable persons from the sisterhood. This is a point for consideration.

lation and other local circumstances of the parish;—that a comfortable lodging, a convenient cottage, or some proper place of abode, be always required to be found by the clergyman applying;—and that, if his other contributions towards the expenses be fairly proportioned to the sources from which it is considered that they could properly be drawn, then a sister should be appointed to the situation. That an arrangement should be made, by which the contributions shall be remitted by the clergyman to the Committee, and that the Sister shall receive an annuity from the Committee, which annuity shall not be regulated by the sum contributed by the parish, but shall be such as, according to the particular advantages of the place, may render her income equal to a stated sum (perhaps 60*l.* a year).\*

\* Suppose, for instance, in a parish of considerable population, the clergyman obtains from the upper classes of the inhabitants various subscriptions, to the amount of 30*l.* a year, and may induce the parish officers to give the rent of the cottage, or the expense of a lodging at a farm-house, and the purchase of such medicines as the Sister may use in her practice. The clergyman will collect his subscriptions, and remit the amount to the committee in London, who, on their parts, will, through their secretary, make regular quarterly remittances to the Sister of the annuity allowed her. It is of main importance that the Sister's income should be certain, and sufficient for her reasonable wants, and it is of equal importance that it should be wholly independent of the subscribing persons, that she may never be tempted, for gain's



That no Sister of Charity shall receive payment for the medical advice and assistance she may afford, except only in cases of midwifery, where the woman delivered is so poor as to receive the payment of the usual fee from the parish, or where she is so rich as to be able to pay it for herself.

That when a Sister of Charity is sent to a parish, in consequence of the application of the clergyman, she shall be placed by the Committee under his care, and shall look up to him as the proper guardian of her rights and interests ; she shall also be guided by his directions in all things relating to her duty, and the clergyman shall be requested to give her the benefit of his kind attention and advice, when necessary, and also to report to the Committee whatever he may have reason to complain of in her conduct.

That some plan shall be adopted, by which the continuance of security from want be as-

sake, to make use of the little arts and contrivances and partialities, which might obtain for her an additional subscription from a richer neighbour. A clergyman-who really knows how to value the assistance he might derive from a Sister of Charity in the discharge of his duty, will discover various expedients by which a subscription for the purpose may be raised. In extreme cases, some such measure as that suggested by Mr. Smith, in his plan of a general infirmary, might be resorted to, by inviting the poor themselves to subscribe a small sum annually.

sured to the Sisters, so that, when they are overtaken by the infirmities of age, or incapacitated by loss of health for the active duties of their situations, an arrangement may be made, by which they may either retire, and reside wherever they may prefer, or else receive an asylum in the establishment, where their time might be most usefully employed in preparing the Probationary Sisters for their duties, by their advice and instructions.

Such, my Lord, is a general outline of the main features of the plan, which has arisen in my mind, from the repeated experience of the evil to be remedied, and a contemplation of the exemplary order of nuns to which I have referred. I have put it forward as concisely as possible, merely to suggest the idea to your Lordship's mind, leaving much detail for future consideration, should any steps be taken in the matter. One point, however, it is necessary to advert to. Hitherto I have only taken into account the advantage of the persons amongst whom these Sisters are proposed to be placed; but it is of importance to observe, also, the advantages which might be derived from such a Society, in affording, not only a delightful but a respectable and comfortable occupation to a number of persons, who would otherwise be reduced from a comparatively exalted sphere of society to abject poverty; for there must



necessarily be a vast number of persons in this situation, who would be the fittest to become Sisters of Charity. There are many Clergymen, in this country, whose stipend is so moderate as to prevent the possibility of their making any provision for their family, and at whose death their widows and orphans become almost destitute. These widows and orphans would hail the opportunity of enrolling themselves in such a Sisterhood, as a providential means of enabling them to continue the same course of Christian duties, to which they have been accustomed; while, at the same time, it would save them from the degradation and misery of menial labour, to which many are obliged to resort. Such persons, if, as is to be hoped, they have had pious dispositions instilled into them, are the properest to select as Sisters of Charity. Widows or orphans of unfortunate but respectable tradesmen, and persons whose incomes are reduced within the limits which would enable them to maintain a respectable rank in society, might, if otherwise fitting, be thus preserved from the miseries of poverty, and set forward in a path, where their exertions might conduce to the glory of God, and the good of mankind. The establishment of such a Sisterhood would be placing another step in the gradations of society, upon which many of those who are falling might find a sure footing, but must otherwise descend to the lowest degree. This is an addi-

tion to the advantages of the plan, which should have great weight.\*

And to facilitate the obtaining this advantage, some arrangement might be made, by which solitary persons, left with small annuities or pensions, might, after their probationary term is passed, place their money or securities in the hands of the committee, or certain persons chosen for the purpose as trustees. These trustees should dispose of their funds, or other resources, to the best advantage, and relieve the Sister herself from all the anxiety, and confusion, and difficulty of arrangement, and liability to fraud, to which unprotected and inexperienced women are so frequently subject; and they could regularly add the amount to the annuity from the establishment, thus freeing the Sister's mind from secular cares, as well as protecting her interest with greater security, and sometimes increasing her income by better employment of her means, than she could procure. Some limitation should be put to the amount of income to be possessed by Sisters—for instance, no person should be eligible for admission into the Sisterhood, whose income, independent of the society, exceeded £100 a year; of which the first fifty should have no influence upon the emolument she would

\* In choosing persons to be Sisters, those should rather be selected whose previous station has been above that which they will hold as such, than those who have lived in a station below it.



receive ; but every ten pounds after that amount should reduce the stated emolument, in the proportion, perhaps, of five pounds.

Should such an establishment be proposed, a sufficient number of eligible persons would, I think, be found without difficulty. Even should any difficulty upon this point appear to exist at first, it ought not to discourage from the attempt; “the wise and active conquer difficulties by daring to attempt them;” and to inspire this “daring,” it should be remembered, that when, in the year 1625, just two centuries ago, the benevolent Vincent de Paul, surnamed “le père des pauvres,” established La Compagnie des Sœurs de la Charité, he could find but *two* pious women, who would offer themselves. Yet from this small seed has grown a large tree, whose branches spread to the furthest parts of the land, and afford a blessed shelter to many a weary traveller in his difficult pilgrimage upon earth.

After so long intruding upon your Lordship’s time, I will only detain you to say a few words concerning the pecuniary means of establishing such a society. It is impossible, at the present moment, to state what would be the precise sum that would be necessary to defray the first expenses of an establishment of the nature I have described, but I think it may fairly be said, that 2000*l.* would be amply sufficient for such

a purpose, supposing the first experiment to be made with twelve probationary Sisters. The necessary income can be more nearly computed. The establishment being conducted with great plainness and frugality, it may be estimated that the household expenses for each person may be 40*l.* a year; say 500*l.* for the twelve; let the Chaplain, the greatest part of whose time must be devoted to his office, have 200*l.* a year; let the Matron, who will live with the Sisters, have a salary of 100*l.*, which is absolutely necessary, as very much will depend on her judgment and fitness for her situation, which must therefore be made worthy the acceptance of a superior person. This will make an income of 800*l.* a year, necessary to support an establishment of twelve Sisters the first year; in the second year, these twelve, supposing they should be all placed in various parishes, making room for other probationary Sisters, will need their several annuities. It may be expected, or indeed required, if necessary, that the parishes where the Sisters are placed, shall contribute, by subscriptions through their clergyman, at least the half of the annuity, say 30*l.* a year; if this be required, the average of the sum supplied by the parishes will be more than 30*l.*, for some may contribute the whole 60*l.*, while none will contribute less than 30*l.*; put the average therefore at 40*l.* for each, which will leave 20*l.* to be provided for by the



Society; this for twelve Sisters will amount to 240*l.* a year, which must be added the second year. If annual subscriptions to the amount of 1040*l.* be obtained, twenty-four Sisters may be prepared, and sent into active usefulness; if 1280*l.* be collected, thirty-six Sisters may be supplied, and so on, at the rate of twelve additional sisters for every 240*l.* subscribed. I do not set down any thing for the attendance upon the hospitals, because I will not doubt that, should the Society be established, and appear to promise the usefulness which I cannot but anticipate, the governors or directors of the principal hospitals in London will, unhesitatingly, admit the Sisters to the advantages of gratuitous instruction, which will be all that is required.

If it shall appear to the British public that such sums as those I have stated, are necessary to forward a plan which holds out a rational expectation of producing an adequate good, there will be no difficulty in raising the amount required. But that the public may have confidence in the plan, and lend their assistance towards it, they must see those, to whose judgments they are accustomed to pay respect, afford their approbation, countenance, and support to it; therefore it is that I have addressed myself to your Lordship as one, whose opinion and co-operation will be essentially necessary

to ensure the confidence of the public at large. Should my plan be considered impracticable, I rely upon your Lordship's appreciation of the motives which have prompted me, to obtain your pardon for my intrusion.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient and  
faithful servant,

A COUNTRY CLERGYMAN.

December, 1825.





